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### True Friends or False? The changing nature of relationships between Indian and British missionary women in the imperial contact zone of India, c1880-1940

#### Echoes from the Past

In the twenty-first century, feminists still struggle to find a vocabulary sufficient to describe their sense of connectedness with each other across distinctions of diversity based on class, culture, race, religion and sexualities. The second wave clarion call of 'sisterhood' papered over such cracks, denying rather than acknowledging the lack of coherence in the category 'woman' or the ways in which power circulated through the politics of feminism and feminists. Women of colour, indigenous and majority world feminists resisted and dismantled the universal claims embedded in western, white, middle class feminist theory and politics, successfully pluralizing feminism(s) and a unitary category of 'woman'. In the 2010s, despite an ever intensifying global connectedness, ways of thinking about, building and naming cross-cultural and cross-racial feminist connections remains a fraught and difficult area of scholarship and politics. As feminist scholars of gender and imperialism, we find uncanny echoes of this contemporary dilemma in the history of women, missions and empire.

In this paper, we look back to a transitional moment in this history – itself part of the *longue duree* of globalization – when new relational configurations were emerging that presaged a post-empire (if not post-colonial) global imaginary figured around relations of friendship rather than relations of ruling. We begin by sketching the changing dynamic within the missionary movement that inspired a push to conceive of the missionary enterprise in terms of friendship and mutuality rather than of mastery, and locating the women's missionary movement in relation to this. One of the questions our paper seeks to explore is the degree to which this shift in vocabulary involved a re-working of the notion of 'sisterhood' underpinning relationships between women in the mission field and the nature of such changes.

We explore this through a micro-history of the changing nature of the relationships between Indian and British missionary women in South India, against the backdrop of Indian nationalist and anti-colonial movements and later the inevitability of Indian independence and the departure of British authorities and British power. We discuss two case studies drawn from the lives of three women: the Indian Christian writer, Krupabai Sathyanadhan; Eleanor Rivett, an Australian missionary; and her British counterpart, Eleanor McDougall, both of whom served as principal of the Women's Christian College in Madras (now Chennai). We attempt to tease out from the available (fragmentary) sources some idea of the range of relational possibilities between Indian and British women in the missionary movement. The paper seeks to address this question from both sides of colonial relationship; how did Indian and western notions of friendship differ? To what extent were they culturally specific? How did British and Indian Christian women understand the nature of the relationships they built with each other in the mission of sisterhood? Furthermore what understandings can be reached from an archive dominated by western accounts? In particular, we focus on how the word 'friendship' operates in these texts in ultimately ambiguous and complex ways to connote a range of connections rather than a singular notion of friendship.

#### “What we need are friends”

At the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910<sup>1</sup>, the first Indian Anglican Bishop, V. S. Azariah, issued an historic call for western missionaries to position themselves as friends to their Indian Christian colleagues, rather than as lords and masters, fathers and sons. “You have given your goods to feed the poor. You have given your bodies to be burned. We also ask for love. Give us FRIENDS!” (315 emphasis in original). His plea was a direct appeal against “the problem of race relationships”, a problem he saw as among the most serious confronting the Church (306). Self-sufficiency and independence on the part of Indian Christian pastors and catechists was often frowned upon, indicative of a reluctance by the missionaries to make themselves unnecessary. This was despite a long-standing commitment among most Protestant missionary societies, to the ideal of a self-governing Indian church, an ideal most missionaries in South India espoused as the aim of fostering a strong local clergy and church-based organisation (see Williams, Collins, and Cox). As Azariah's speech demonstrated, Christian missionaries tended to view themselves as superior to Indians whether Christian or not. The universality of Christian spirituality was imbricated with that more parochial sense of racial superiority that formed the bedrock of empire. The spiritual mission of salvation went hand in hand with the hubris of the civilizing mission. Azariah's speech, as Dana L. Robert (100) points out, was not only a criticism of missionary racism, but an expression of his own belief in the possibility and the power of cross-cultural friendship to fulfil the spiritual ambitions of an evangelistic religion. A religion that sought a world communion of believers was necessarily multicultural in its composition. In the decades following the Conference, new vocabularies of mission based on cross-racial friendships informed the international missionary movement.

The rhetoric of the British women's missionary movement was couched somewhat differently, in the language of sisterhood rather than the overtly maternal language of mother/daughter (father/son) as scholars such as Susan Thorne, Rhonda Semple and Elizabeth Prevost, amongst others, have demonstrated. Of course, sisters are ranked by age and maturity; the distinctions of which, when mapped on the civilizational time line of colonial discourse, ensured that 'age' elided into maturity and the assumption that the woman missionary was fit to 'bring the light' to Indian women regardless of age or status. But was this an issue of race status or religious expertise? And to what extent did it occlude an ability to forge meaningful friendships? Recently Elizabeth Prevost has usefully cautioned against a simplistic interpretation of mission relationships as always and only about colonial subjugation. Instead, she posits a need to historicize the mission of sisterhood suggesting that it would yield more complicated stories 'of solidarity and empowerment as much as fragmentation and subjugation' (241). Prevost argues that the women's missionary movement post about 1860, constructed a "mutual space where spirituality and 'sisterhood' could transcend distance, counteract secularization, and loosen the restrictions of ecclesiastical, gendered, economic and colonial forms of subordination" (292). We acknowledge the importance of building a more complicated picture of the mission of sisterhood, however, we suggest a notion of a continuum or spectrum where both solidarity and subjugation might be relatively intertwined.

#### Indian Christian Women and Women Missionaries in Relationship

In India, as in most other mission fields, Christian converts were crucial to the missionary effort; they provided the labour of mind and body through which the educational and proselytising efforts of the mission could be affected. While Christianity had ancient roots in the religious mosaic of pre-colonial South India, it was the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that witnessed the emergence of a numerically significant and distinctive Indian Christian presence in the region. Most of these converts were drawn from the lower castes of the pre-colonial religious based political economy. Converts from high caste communities, especially Brahmin, were few and far between although highly sought after by the missionary societies because they were seen as the key to influencing the broader Indian society towards Christian civility. By the 1880s, 'women's work' as it was referred to, was an established component of the missionary effort in South India, made up of a range of activities around educating girls in boarding schools, providing training and managing income generating activities for the graduates of these schools and their mothers, and in 'zenana visitation' – an outreach of preaching and education to mainly higher caste women and girls in their homes. It was the "bible women", primarily drawn from ex low caste Christian communities, who acted as the teachers, evangelists and midwives working under the direction of the women missionaries who formed a crucial component of the missionary effort.

The nature of the relationships forged between the 'lady missionary' and the 'bible woman' under the rubric of 'sisterhood' are difficult to capture historically except through the gaze of the missionary interlocutor, embedded in the archival records of Missionary Society correspondence, reports and publications, occasionally enriched by more personal correspondence lurking amongst official records; and the memoirs and biographies of serving missionaries. Rarely are the bible women's own voices heard, except in translation as part of a missionary discourse. What is clear from the missionary texts is that the bible women were usually in a relationship of 'superintendence' with the missionary women, which set any 'friendship' within a hierarchy of race, class, gender and spiritual distinction. Sisterhood registered in the cadence of imperial feminist maternalism's vocabulary of mother/daughter. Occasionally, however, another realm of connection and engagement is hinted at, in the relationships occasionally forged between Christian women from formerly high caste families and female missionaries. Even rarer in the South Indian context, is a historical text

#### FURTHER INFORMATION

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authored by such an Indian woman herself, before well into the twentieth century, when Indian women began to assume leadership positions within the Indian church. Fortunately for the historian of women and colonialism, Krupabai Saththianadhan, or Mrs Samuel Saththianadhan, as she is often referred to, left such a record in her novel, *Saguna, A Story of Native Christian Life* originally published as a serial in 1887-8 in the Madras Christian College Magazine, and subsequently published posthumously as a book in 1895, with a Tamil edition published in 1896.

Krupabai was the daughter of Brahmin convert parents, and the second wife of Samuel Saththianadhan, third generation scion of one of the leading Indian Christian families in South India throughout the later 19th and 20th centuries. Educated and highly literate, Krupabai wrote the first "autobiographical novel in English by an Indian woman" as the 1998 Oxford India publication of her book proclaims on its front cover. The book is a slightly fictionalised account of the lives of her parents and herself, particularly her father's conversion to Christianity and the journey his child bride takes to eventually join him in a profession of that faith. *Saguna*, the protagonist of the story, clearly based on Krupabai herself, describes several encounters she has with European missionaries. In every account *Saguna* finds herself bristling at and challenging the presumption of superiority by the Europeans, as the two excerpts below reveal.

On her first visit to a missionary bungalow, accompanying her mother to greet the new missionary and his wife, *Saguna* envisages a friendship with the missionary daughter but finds herself firmly put down:

"If I talk she will be my friend", I said, and in my desperation I began to speak about what was uppermost in my mind. I asked her if she had any interesting story books to lend. She raised her eyebrows, and the next minute I felt the audacity and awkwardness of putting her that question.

She said, however, "You read? You can't read what I read. You won't understand".

I said, "I will try," but she immediately added that she never lent her books.

There was no more talk. "Why had I come?" I said to myself, and longed to see my mother going. At last she got up and we took leave. My mind in a whirl. "Oh! Mother, it was well you got up so soon, or less I really should have run home. Don't you ever take me to a missionary's house again".

"Hush! You are a naughty girl; how can you expect them to be friends? Don't you see the difference, they are white and we are black; we ought to be thankful for the little notice that they take of us".

"But, mother, the Collector's wife is also white, and when I went with my sister to her house, she was quite different. She took us inside, made my sister sit beside her, and she spoke so sweetly and gently to me that I felt quite happy. She asked me what I learnt, gave me cake and tea, and I felt as if I were talking to my sister". (99)

Interestingly, *Saguna*/Krupabai does not again refer to race in the explicit terms of her mother. As in this extract, invariably the arrogance of some is set off against the warmth and friendship of others. Always, *Saguna* has no hesitation in querying the European missionaries' assumptions of superiority. The placing of the vocabulary of 'race' and colour with her mother in the novel, hints at Krupabai's awareness of a generational shift in point of view and discourse between mother and daughter that she sought to chart. *Saguna's* mother articulates a conventionally phrased sense of subordination and domination – a kind of servile gratefulness in keeping with the maternalist discourse of the missionary texts of the era. *Saguna's* words and behaviour are, however, far more resistant. *Saguna* refuses the servility of the governed and insists there is a broader terrain of relationship available with missionaries beyond the infantilism implied in her mother's distinction of colour and the missionary child's behaviour, a relational context she defines as 'sisterly' because of its basis in love and affection; an emotional range that belies hierarchies of race and domination, being instead based on mutuality and recognition. The next excerpt reveals that *Saguna's* sense of self and identity is firmly couched in an awareness of her own modernity as an Indian as well as a Christian:

During a stay with two female missionaries, both of whom supported her sister's zenana work, *Saguna* has a tempestuous relationship with Miss Roberts, a rather temperamental personality it seems, explained by her colleague in terms of her being Irish. At one point, when Miss Roberts complains that her colleague had received a Bible Woman in the drawing room rather than the kitchen, *Saguna*, who knew this woman as a friend of her family, exploded:

"In the kitchen?" I said, in amazement and indignation. I was angry, and thought of many grievances that I had heard spoken of. I had also heard that we were the real aristocrats of our country and that the English ladies who came to India only belonged to the middle class, and I resolved to tell her that, so I boldly added: "What do you think of us? We are the real aristocrats of this place." Unfortunately, I pronounced the big word wrongly, and she burst out laughing and repeated it again and again, as I had done. "I don't care. Anyhow, you are middle-class people. She is a Brahmin, and only takes money from the Mission because she is poor. She is no servant. In your country you are no Brahmins. You are Sudras." Tears fell from my eyes, and I felt as I should choke". (115)

Miss Roberts expressed indignation at such 'disrespectful' and 'rude' behaviour and both went off to their rooms where *Saguna* began to cry and say to herself 'we are natives. Tomorrow she will say that my mother was a Bible-woman too. ...'. But very soon after, Miss Roberts came to *Saguna's* room and kissed and made up, promising not to send Bible Women to the kitchen and laughing. Krupabai ends the story of *Saguna's* visit, which apparently lasted several months, by saying how much she loved 'those two ladies ... in spite of little quarrels now and then ...'. (117).

In some ways, Krupabai's text gives little guidance in how to 'read' *Saguna's* engagements with European missionaries and the women missionaries she stayed with. Superficially, she seems to prefer to claim her equivalence, even superiority, over the missionaries in terms of the codes of class and culture rather than race. Running through her account is a kind of gamesmanship; a continual parrying, which always ends amicably enough. In this sense, there is a sisterly quality about *Saguna's* engagements with Miss Roberts. Hence, although their quarrels are vehement, and *Saguna's* rejection of Miss Roberts' hierarchical relegation of herself and others as 'natives' never wavers, she can still 'love' her and value their time together. *Saguna* resists the conventional doctrine of mission imperialism. She does this by modelling cross cultural friendships bound around a secure sense of Indianness based in the universalisms of both civility and religion. The novel depicts an emotional range of sisterhood based on equivalence, merit and affection that confirms what Azariah had in mind. Is it a postcolonial voice? Perhaps not, but it is definitely revealing of how a young Christian Indian woman is able to think herself in ways that refigure the tension between the universal and the particular embedded in mission imperialism away from subordination and domination to a respectful interaction between spiritual equals and equivalent, if different, national subjects.

As noted above, with the dawning of the twentieth century, new and more liberal ideas of mission, crystallised at the Edinburgh conference, were coming into vogue. Some missionaries sought to better understand non-Christian religions (Singh 2000, p.180-1) and began to employ a discourse of friendship in relation to Indians. Susan Haskell Khan has argued that increasingly American women missionaries in India 'presented themselves as allies, rather than as saviours of Hindu women' (Khan 2010, p.150). Missionary societies moved towards sharing scarce resources rather than competing against each other, working together in united missionary activities in schools and colleges, at least.

Records from the Women's Christian College (WCC), founded in Madras in 1915, provide the opportunity to explore how two women college principals and missionaries elaborated their relationships with their Indian women students, staff and colleagues over the period 1915-1947.<sup>ii</sup> As with the example of Krupabai Saththianadhan, we see the complexities of a shared spirituality and apparent sisterhood, enabling solidarity but also often linked to subjugation.

The early twentieth century saw the rise of the professional woman missionary, often highly educated and a trained educator, nurse or medical doctor (See Brouwer 2002; Grimshaw and Sherlock 2005). Eleanor McDougall (1873-1956), the founding principal of Women's Christian College, was one such woman, holding an M.A. in Classics from the University of London. She did some post-graduate work in archaeology at Cambridge, before becoming a lecturer at Westfield College in London in 1902 (see 'Eleanor McDougall'). Following upon the Edinburgh Conference, the need for a Christian higher education institution for women in Southern India was mooted. In 1912, Eleanor McDougall was commissioned by the Continuation Committee of the Edinburgh Conference (later the International Missionary Council), to survey higher education for women in India. She travelled around meeting 'all sorts of educationalists and Government officials' (*The Sunflower* 1938, p. 5) and the subsequent report led to the establishment of the college in 1915. This was an ecumenical and international venture, supported financially by twelve women's missionary societies from Britain and the United States.

On her way to take up her position in India in 1915, Eleanor McDougall visited the contributing American missionary societies. She developed

relationships with influential American women who were able to access considerable funds to finance the growth of the college over a number of years. She seemed well-fitted to found a women's college and under her leadership, the Women's Christian College grew and prospered. Many Christian and non-Christian families across Southern India were eager to send their daughters to the college. The focus was upon educating Christian girls, but around a quarter of the students were from non-Christian families.

As principal of the college from its inception until her retirement in 1937, McDougall was closely identified with the college. Often many women from one family – mothers, daughters, sisters, cousins and nieces – attended the college. She knew a great deal about particular families and was witness to the unfolding of individual and family stories. She also wrote anniversary booklets about the history of the college, and on her retirement was described by Elizabeth George, an Indian member of staff, as 'the strongest link between the different generations of Staff and students' (George 1938, p. 19). As the contingent of Indian staff increased, they were often drawn from the ranks of former students. Elizabeth George had herself been a WCC student and must have been a young girl when she first met Eleanor McDougall. Thus McDougall's position, already 'Privileged automatically by race in a cross-cultural milieu' (Singh 2000, p. 235), was further strengthened by her role in educating her staff. Maina Chawla Singh has observed of similar institutions, 'the mentor-pupil relationship seldom outgrew its original protective model to assume new forms of a colleague/peer relationship' and such institutions became 'territories within which missionary educators ... enjoyed positions of power and privilege.' (232-3) McDougall appears to have been greatly admired, even loved by her students and staff, but her relationships with the Indian staff were characterised by a certain aloofness, rather than a solidarity.

McDougall came to India at the age of 42 years, she had already achieved a great deal in Britain and was in India to undertake the daunting job of establishing the college. She did not use the language of friendship. She did not learn any of the languages of South India. She came to India with an agenda, namely to change Indian girls and women, to educate them and hopefully to convert them to Christianity, to help make them modern (Allen 2010). All her interactions with them must be seen as heavily overshadowed by this project. She was concerned to foster her relationships with the foreign donors to the college. A reading of the confidential 'Principal Journals', which she regularly shared with the British and American supporters of the college, demonstrates that her attitudes were also characterised by what Barbara Bush has termed, 'the racial arrogance of pre-war feminists' (Bush 2004, p.83).

McDougall, perhaps understandably, had a somewhat proprietary attitude towards the college she founded. In her journals she wrote very 'frankly' and 'freely' (McDougall, October 1934: p. 22) about the activities, the failures and foibles of her women students. She often sat in judgement of them, their families and their society, in the journals addressed to her own Western friends and to the college's supporters. Written in a chatty conversational style, with their discussion of the affairs of the students, converts and possible converts, these journals belong to a long tradition in missionary writing from the field to supporters at home (Johnston, 2003).<sup>4</sup> In such accounts, as in McDougall's journals, it was possible to follow the fortunes of particular individuals as they wavered over the decision to convert, converted, and then negotiated the consequent social ostracism and possibly became a 'back-slider'; returning to their original faith. In missionary publications, these accounts would be concluded by a request for supporters to pray for these people's conversion and could often be the hinge for donations to the mission venture. (See Haggis n.d. and Haggis and Allen, 2005)

Her accounts lack respect for the agency of her students and former students. Thus in May 1934, she wrote of a recent graduate who had expressed an interest in Christianity:

[One] about whom I wrote about last time, Varada is marrying into a rich North Indian family, very liberal and educated Hindus she tells me, who will give her a good deal of freedom. Her danger will be the difficulty of maintaining spiritual aspiration in such a mild atmosphere and of finding scope for her energies. (6)

McDougall had hopes that her student Roja, was coming near to converting, but wrote in a most disparaging manner about her father, 'a caste Hindu of good birth', continuing,

He has a grudge against his family and spends his days in reading the newspapers and neglecting the very charming and promising children who are growing up around him. (6-7)

Without Roja's knowledge, her family's business was being discussed with McDougall's friends in Britain and the United States. McDougall tightly restricted access to these journals in which the Indian women were written about (McDougall April 1933, p.1). However her attitudes were not to remain confined to a select circle.

In 1940 she wrote a book about her Indian years, entitled *Lamps in the Wind*. A strong theme of this volume was the notion that missionary educators like herself had sought to spread the light of Christianity and modernity to Indian womanhood, drawing here upon 'a standard missionary metaphor that depicted Christian civilization as a lamp illuminating the darkness of heathenism.' (Khan 2010, p.152)

The question was posed as to whether these lamps would now grow in strength or would be blown out by the characteristic weakness of Indian society and Indian womanhood. Continuing in the vein of her journals and using some incidents already recounted there, McDougall represented Indian womanhood as weak and wavering, gullible, unable to be independent and self-sufficient and essentially 'deficient in strength of will and independence of opinion.' (McDougall 1940, p. 21) There was, she claimed, 'the longing, bred by centuries of over-sheltered life to evade responsibility', 'the mental habit of docility to the command of a man' along with 'the inbred submissiveness to masculine domination' (9-10).

The publication of this book meant that now Indian women of WCC became more aware of the aspects of domination in McDougall's relationships with them. Reading this volume, the Indian staff of WCC were outraged and felt deeply betrayed by their former principal. Eleanor Rivett, the new principal reported that a number of the Indian senior college staff were:

deeply hurt by what is to them a picture of the Indian woman student which stresses her weaknesses unduly, and they consider the very personal details of actual and still remembered happenings in College constitute a breach of the confidence they have always given their greatly beloved Principal. (Rivett, 1940)

Margaret Hunt noted the reaction of an Indian colleague Sara Abraham, who was

in an explosion of distress about the book. It doesn't, an Indian feels, do justice to Indian women...it seems to the Indian members of the Staff...that she has written entirely of extraordinary exceptional incidents, not of the normal life of the College which really flows on very joyously.... Miss McDougall doesn't do justice to Indian womanhood.' (Hunt 1940, 43)

Eleanor Rivett (1883-1972) (Godden, 1988) McDougall's successor, who had to deal with the ensuing crisis, had different attitudes towards and relationships with her Indian students and colleagues. Susan Haskell Khan has suggested that 'Disagreements over the missionaries' relationships with Indian women often reflected generational differences.' (153) Certainly Rivett was only a decade younger than McDougall, but in her relationships with Indian women and men notions of solidarity appear to have a higher profile. It is important to emphasise that like McDougall she came to India to help, meaning to educate and change Indian women and girls. However in her case, she had developed greater respect for Indian people, their ambitions, their struggles, their cultures and beliefs.

Rivett, an Australian, came to India in 1907, aged 24 years, as the principal of a girls' school in Kolkata. She studied Bengali and learnt a great deal about Bengali literature and culture. In contrast with the South, Bengal was the crucible of Indian nationalism in the first decades of the twentieth century, witnessing 'more fervent nationalist activity in the early decades of the twentieth century' (Singh 2000, 175). It was in this testing atmosphere and in the spirit of Edinburgh that Rivett laid the bases for her life's work and her relationships with Indian girls and women.

There were few conversions to Christianity here and missionaries could learn to work with influential people of nationalist beliefs. Indeed Rivett was very interested in the project of the Edinburgh conference. She embraced the policies of working with Indian Christians on a more equal basis and was active in the Young Women's Christian Association in Kolkata, which provided many 'opportunities for cross-cultural co-operation' (Howe 2001, 317).

Almost half of the students in her school were from non-Christian backgrounds and she largely respected their beliefs and their families. In the Bengal Women's Education League, (Southard, 1988) which she served as secretary from its beginning in 1927 until she left Bengal in 1937, she worked closely with well-educated and experienced nationalists and feminists. The membership of this organization was, as she put it, '80% Indian'. (Rivett, 1928) Such work in 'organizations under the leadership of middle-class Indian women' was part of the new missionary strategy (Khan 2010,

p.152).

Her respect for non-Christian faiths also saw her deeply involved in committee work to develop booklets in Bengali for inter-faith religious services in schools. Rivett reflected on this cross-cultural experience:

Those who worked together over this compilation have found it a liberal education, to discover and to be mindful of the religious heritage of each member of the group in regard to thought and phrasing. (Rivett 1929, p.15)

Her Bengali experience made her aware that the rule of the 'Britishers' in India was limited, and she declared in 1926, 'We must leave India, all of us,' continuing:

Some – whose real understanding had been appreciated - would be invited back, possibly, but it would be to work under different conditions, in a different relationship. India has no use of superior persons, but did want friends alongside, who would work with her to enter her upon her rightful heritage. (Rivett 1926, 11)

The greater emphasis upon solidarity in her relationships with Indian people saw her abandon the confidential judgements that had characterised McDougall's Principal's Journals. In Rivett's journals, which were printed in Madras and freely distributed to college staff, the note 'For Private Circulation' soon disappeared. Their tone focussed upon the achievements of the students and staff. In 1940, when her staff became aware of the harsh and unflattering judgements in Eleanor McDougall's book, she tackled the problem it presented in a characteristically open and respectful fashion, arranging for all WCC staff to read it before convening a group discussion. Elizabeth George led this discussion and her comments were conciliatory, even-handed and respectful of McDougall, her long-time teacher and mentor. However she did suggest that McDougall did not understand Indian values and notions of family responsibility.

In pondering Indian women's views of their relationships with these missionary women, it is important to note that much of the information about the nature of the relationships between McDougall and Rivett and their Indian students and colleagues come from missionary sources. We can only attempt to read Indian responses to them from fragmentary materials, chiefly from the laudatory publications issued by the staff and students of the college on the occasion of each of these women's retirement in 1937 and 1947.

When Eleanor McDougall, retired Elizabeth George wrote in a highly complimentary manner about her mentor: she 'in every way treated us as her friends' (George 1938, 19). As a senior staff member, she would have had access to McDougall's journals and indeed referred to them in a positive tone as one of the means that McDougall used 'to draw us nearer to each other and to strengthen our fellowship' (19). However, as we have seen, she was more critical of McDougall's categorical and public judgements upon the mind of the Indian woman when they were drawn together in *Lamps in the Wind*.

In a number of the Indian comments upon Eleanor Rivett, notions of co-operation of 'friends alongside', of solidarity more than domination and subjugation are prevalent. Thus Mary Masilamani commented, 'My first impression was one of friendliness.' (WCC, 33) Another commented, when the floods came in the college, 'we found Miss Rivett just like one of ourselves, friendly, sympathetic, seeing the humorous side of the situation and laughing over it with us.' (34) Finally Elizabeth George, wrote,

Yet we think of her more as a friend, to work with her was a delightful privilege, rather than as a leader, for she always trusted us with responsibility and made us feel at home with her as her co-workers. (32)

But even as we note the greater solidarity that permeated Rivett's relationships, we need to remember that notions of friendship are subtle and various. Like McDougall, Rivett was part of a project to change Indian women and girls. When she retired back to Sydney, she could think back over her years at WCC, looking over the photo album of the college presented to her on her retirement (Long, c1947). The photographs of the class groups, of the college activities and of the staff were those of friends, but also images of what she and others had achieved in their work to create a modern Indian womanhood. We must wonder whether these friends at the college were friends in the same way and to the same extent as the women friends with whom she shared her summer holidays in the Indian hills, the single women missionaries from Australia and Britain and those she had known as a young woman in the Student Christian Movement and at the University of Melbourne.

## Conclusion

These brief examples of Indian and British women's texts that describe their sense of each other are shaped by the contexts the women found themselves within. Mrs Sathianadhan is not a 'typical' Indian Christian by virtue of her origins as a high caste Brahmin that inflected her sense of her and her family's social status. This shapes Saguna's sense of entitlement and awareness of class and status in the British society her missionary 'sisters' hailed from. Even Miss Roberts' relegation of the Bible Woman to the kitchen is not straightforward evidence of racialised power, pure and simple. Her precise words, as written by Rupabai, were, 'In England we receive them in the kitchen. She is no better than a servant, I assure you' (114), indicating the intertwining of race and class that mirrors in some ways Saguna's vocabularies and echoes the historical evidence of analogies drawn across race, class and religion such that the Irish poor could be 'black', and the poor of central London 'heathen'.

Recognizing how class, caste, race and gender were refracted through the sense of Christian mission both Indian Christian and British women missionaries shared, does not mean we must suspect or refute the relationships forged by Indian and British women in missionary work. Rather, we argue these are a continuum or spectrum in which both solidarity and subjugation might be relatively intertwined, in complex and ultimately ambiguous and perhaps enabling ways. Eleanor McDougall's more hierarchical approach probably worked to get the WCC established and to fund it. Rivett could imagine the end of colonialism and Indian authority and independence and worked with her staff to fit her students for that. For both, Indian women staff and students had a kind regard. The universalism embedded in evangelical Christianity's conviction of 'one unto Christ' in a sense provides the room to move for Indian Christians in particular to negotiate new socio-political spaces such that an Indian woman teacher and a lady missionary principal might feel a sense of solidarity and kinship despite the hierarchy of civility and race.

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<sup>i</sup>This gathering of the Protestant missionaries marked new directions in missionary endeavours, viz. greater appreciation of non-Christian cultures and religions and the fostering of indigenous leadership and national churches in Asia and Africa.

<sup>ii</sup>This draws upon an earlier paper viz., Margaret Allen, "A Breach of Confidence by Their Greatly Beloved Principal": A Furore at Women's Christian College, Chennai, India, 1940' 2012 in (eds) F. de Haan, M. Allen, K. Daskalova and J. Purvis, *Women's Activism: Global Perspectives from the 1890s to the present* Routledge, London, pp. 168-182.

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